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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3405

July 7, 2004

Honorable Ann M. Veneman
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Veneman:

As you know, drought, floods, and general problems with weather extremes continue to plague farmers and ranchers across the United States. Already, hundreds of U.S. counties have been declared eligible for some form of disaster relief this year, and many more are pending approval. What began as a very promising year for crop and livestock producers is now threatened by certain losses and the likelihood that many operations will not survive without emergency assistance.

In response to this growing crisis, we urge you to take the following steps:

1) **Allow haying and grazing of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acreage immediately.** Your earlier decision to allow grazing of CRP land has brought some relief to livestock producers – but more steps need to be taken. USDA should immediately open all CRP acres in designated counties for haying and grazing – including acres enrolled under the CRP's CP23 "wetlands restoration" practice. This will provide important assistance to farmers and ranchers, especially in communities affected by drought.

2) **Allow livestock producers located in emergency-designated counties to hay and graze CRP acres in non-emergency counties.** Such a move would add promising new supplies of forage by reducing the current penalty for haying and grazing CRP acres from 25 percent to 10 percent of the CRP payment rate.

3) **Allow planting and harvesting of forage crops on prevented plant acreage, without a reduction in crop insurance indemnity payments.** Under current crop insurance procedures, producers who attempt to establish a cover crop on prevented planting acres cannot hay or graze the cover crop without limiting their indemnity to 35 percent of the prevented planting guarantee. The possibility of waiving that guarantee reduction in emergency situations needs to be thoroughly explored. In addition, non-statutory requirements allow producers to utilize the cover crop after November 1. Therefore, we request your support for changing this access date from November 1 to an alternative date as early as September 1.

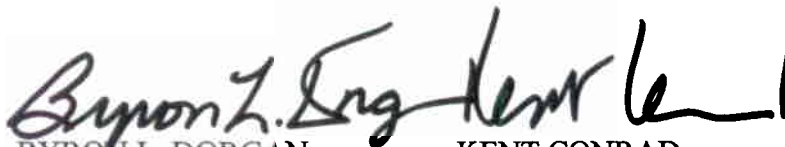
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4) Use Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) resources to provide emergency feed for livestock producers in drought affected counties. CCC funds should be used to help defray the acquisition and/or transportation costs associated with moving feed to needy areas. One promising feed source is distillers dried grains (DDG), an excellent feed now in surplus supply.

5) Secure the Administration's endorsement of S. 2592/H.R. 4705, the "Agricultural Assistance of 2004". This legislation would bring much needed relief to both crop and livestock producers. Similar to other recent disaster measures, this bill would provide assistance while reinforcing the message that farmers should rely on crop insurance as their principal risk management tool.

All of these issues demand immediate action on behalf of the Department. Our farmers are facing a dire situation. We urge you to take these steps as swiftly as possible.

Sincerely,



BYRON L. DORGAN
United States Senate

KENT CONRAD
United States Senate



EARL POMEROY
Member of Congress